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BOOK REVIEW

More Corrections about the Book *Phenomena*

In mid-March of 2017, colleagues on private discussion lists for scientific studies of parapsychological phenomena began discussing the forthcoming publication of Annie Jacobsen's new book, *Phenomena: The Secret History of the U. S. Government's Investigations into Extrasensory Perception and Psychokinesis* (Jacobsen 2017). Expectations were understandably high, as the jacket of *Phenomena* bills it as "The definitive history of the military's decades-long investigation into mental powers and phenomena." Knowing a lot about that important area, since I spent a year as a consultant of the Stanford Research Institute's (SRI's) original program on remote viewing, as well as having done many independent studies of parapsychological phenomena and related areas like altered states of consciousness (ASCs) and transpersonal psychology, I was very interested. But my colleagues' main comments were about important distortions of the history in the book. McMoneagle's (2017) detailed refutation and correction of *Phenomena* in this *JSE* issue (Summer 2017) is the start of many detailed articles on this.

Annie Jacobsen's name rang a bell, and I recalled she did a pleasant interview with me a few years ago, although it was primarily about my work with ASCs, rather than parapsychology. She kindly sent me a copy of *Phenomena*, though apologizing for using so little of that material and only mentioning me twice in the book.

So I began reading with great interest, but caution. She's an excellent writer. The text flows nicely and I easily get caught up in the story lines. But a "definitive history" requires more than a smooth flow, it requires rigorous factuality. So I've concentrated here on her two mentions of me and my work, and, I'm sad to say, have had to question the "definitive history" categorization.

Her first mention of me (p. 69) notes, largely in passing, my attendance at a conference on human energy fields where Andrija Puharich described some of his research. She writes "Also present at the conference were several of Puharich's former colleagues from the Round Table Foundation, including Arthur Young and Charles T. Tart." Puharich is a controversial figure in scientific parapsychological research, although I believe some of his early research was very important. Describing me as a colleague from Puharich's Round Table research is a small departure from factuality that perhaps honors me too much, I was just a college sophomore then. Under most circumstances, I would not bother to point this out, but it's that "definitive" adjective.

I worked for Puharich as a research assistant for the summer of 1957, between my sophomore year as an MIT student and transferring to Duke University as a junior. Duke was where J. B. Rhine's laboratory was located, and I chose it because of my interests in parapsychology. On the other hand, I am the only scientific parapsychologist I know of who carried out a high quality, double-blind study of one of Puharich's basic discoveries, confirming that the electrical condition of a Faraday cage could enhance ESP ability (Tart 1988), so I became a colleague many years later.

But the second mention is more seriously distorted. I regret that the publisher (Little Brown and Company) didn't fact check the manuscript before publishing if they were going to use that word "definitive" to describe it. Jacobsen writes:

> As head of the Electro-Optic Threat Assessment section, Graff was also involved in an array of brainstorming ideas, designed to beat the MX missile basing system as part of an official Air Force vulnerability assessment team. He wondered whether remote viewers using ESP could determine which transport vehicles were carrying the real missiles and which were carrying dummy warheads. He contracted with Hal Puthoff to conduct a study. Using a computer-generated shell game, Puthoff's colleague Charles Tart of the University of California, Davis collected data from a group of psychics tasked to try to beat the shell game. Random guesses would produce a correct guess 10% of the time. On the average, remote viewers trained in SRI protocols were correct 25% of the time. One "sensitive" individual in the group produced exceptional results, Graff learned. After 50 shell game trials times, she had guessed the location of a marble with an accuracy of 80%. Hal Puthoff's report for Graff indicated that remote viewers could significantly increase the odds in determining the location of the real ICBMs. This report was sent to the Pentagon. (pp. 218–219)

Really dramatic, yes? And mostly real and very important! Very briefly described: What was going on?

The "computer-generated shell game" was not a project developed or carried out at SRI, though, nor was it done with the MX missile system in mind. Many years before, I analyzed the way ESP was commonly tested with multiple-choice guessing (Tart 1966), usually with cards, and, although it could be described as a "shell game," there were no peas, no shells, nothing was physically manipulated. It struck me that doing multiple trials without immediate feedback as to whether you were right or wrong (that would have invalidated the statistics used then by allowing some form of card

counting to inflate scores) was what was standardly called in psychology an *extinction paradigm*, a way to confuse and discourage a person, even if they had some talent to begin with, until they showed only chance results, and that's what was commonly found, a *decline effect* as it was called, in ESP studies. This decline effect provided strong evidence for the reality of ESP. People get tired, bored, confused, but chance doesn't. The positive side of my analysis was that if you used a computer-like device to randomize targets/cards, you could give immediate feedback and you would expect declines to disappear and see the start of learning. That's what I found in my later studies at the University of California at Davis, reported in detail in Tart (1976), and also in this *Journal* (Tart 2017).

The year I was consulting full time on remote viewing at SRI (1978– 1979) was when they were asked to see if the MX missile system could be defeated. The basic question was that the Soviets had a certain number of (very expensive!) ICBMs, as we did, and if they launched a first strike, could they wipe out most of our missiles before we could launch and then take over the world? Neither we nor the Soviets could afford to build several times as many missiles (and there was already enough nuclear weaponry to blow up the earth several times over in those insane times!), but we could afford to build (for many billions!) a lot of silos to hide missiles in and constantly shuttle them about in a concealed way. The Soviets would not know which silos were empty, which had the missiles they wanted to destroy, we could retaliate devastatingly if they struck first, so (hopefully!) they wouldn't.

But if you had some way of knowing better, not perfectly but better, where our missiles were, maybe a Soviet first strike would be worthwhile? That was the question SRI was tasked with: Could ESP, remote viewing by the Soviets, improve their odds of winning with a first strike?

Hal Puthoff did the sophisticated mathematical analyses, using both results from SRI remote viewing studies up until that time AND the data from my ESP training studies at UC Davis. I don't know the relative weights given these two kinds of data, but I think my data were particularly frightening.

Jacobsen writes that I ". . . collected data from a group of psychics," implying specially talented people, "psychics." Maybe there weren't too many "psychics" around in the Soviet Union so there wasn't too much danger?

But my data was from ordinary college students, roughly a couple of thousand to start with, who had no thoughts of being "psychics," they were ordinary students at UC Davis who were selected by taking a very simple and quick card-guessing test at the end of one of their regular classes. Details on this screening are provided elsewhere (Palmer, Tart, & Redington 1976). The ones who scored high were invited to take half a dozen formal ESP tests in the laboratory with one of my several student apprentices. Those who continued to

score high probably had some ESP ability to begin with, and they were then each able to take part in 20 formal tests, with immediate feedback. If you could end up with even half a dozen people quite talented at ESP, at a level practical enough to indicate, with far from perfect but better-than-chance accuracy, which silos had missiles in them, finding and training "psychics" to beat the MX system looked practical.

OK, I've set the record straighter on that part that I was intimately involved with, but examination of just this particular aspect of the book has certainly alerted me to be cautious and skeptical about how "definitive" *Phenomena* is . . .

CHARLES T. TART
Professor Emeritus, University of California at Davis
cttart@ucdavis.edu

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